



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON

February 10, 2016

To: House Rules Committee
Representative Jennifer Williamson, Chair

Re: HB 4085 – Independent Expenditures – **Comment**

The League of Women Voters is a 96 year old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League has long-standing positions that support reliable information about political campaign financing as being critical to campaign transparency.

Oregon voters adopted campaign contribution limits by initiative in 1994. During the 1996 state campaigns it became clear that campaign contribution limits would cause independent expenditures to increase. The Oregon Supreme Court later declared the 1994 contribution limits to be unconstitutional, leaving Oregon voters with campaign finance disclosure as their only protection against high campaign spending, potential corruption and undue influence.

It is now clear that campaign contribution limits, favored by voters by as much as 80% in some opinion polls, will eventually return to Oregon in one form or another. These may be enabled by HJR 205 in the current session, by the recommended constitutional amendment of the Task Force on Campaign Finance Reform to this legislature, or by IP 77 that is currently gathering signatures.

If the voters adopt one of these reforms, then independent expenditures will again become a way to circumvent the contribution limits, and a bill like HB 4085 will become necessary to discourage independent expenditures. However, the League believes that HB 4085 has significant problems for this purpose.

Firstly, the low disclosure limit in HB 4085 of \$50 may invite a law suit analogous to the federal suit that resulted in \$100 contribution limits being declared unconstitutionally low.

Secondly, HB 4085 does not get at the real problem. No one really cares about a person spending \$50 on signs or flyers for their neighborhood. What we should care about are the huge "Dark Money" independent expenditures unleashed by the *Citizens United* case. Such huge expenditures by individuals, so-called social policy nonprofits, corporations and unions can be very damaging to legitimate political campaigns, candidates lose control of their messaging, and voters do not know what to think. Furthermore, many dark money groups do not have to disclose where their money came from.

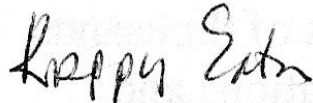
The League believes that the solution to these problems is not necessarily to lower the disclosure limit for independent expenditures, but we should require the disclosure of the sources of money used for these expenditures to the same extent as for normal candidate and other political committees. We have attached a draft of some amendments to the ORS that would do that.

Furthermore, requiring disclosure of "top contributors" in campaign advertising would also discourage independent expenditures.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



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LWV of Oregon President



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